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The Construction of Life

Reviewing modern, scientific civilization, a commentator has made the very pertinent observation that it is not invested with ideological permanence. This seems quite true when we consider that Copernicus replaced Ptolemy, Newton replaced Copernicus, and Einstein replaced Newton.

The culture of the modern age has come to be called the 'culture of technology'. But this is a contradiction in terms. Culture, by its very nature, suggests permanence. But science and technology are sadly wanting in this quality. Ergo, any culture based on technology will always, have the characteristics of impermanence. It can never meet the eternal requirements of human nature.

Technology is of material service to man. As such, it cannot be the total basis of human culture. It can certainly take us from the age of the plough to the age of the tractor or, from the bullock-cart to the aeroplane. But technology cannot give man a culture or a civilization in the real sense of those words. Technology can serve man but it cannot be expected to provide man with the spiritual mainspring of his life – a religion.

Technology, in short, is the servant of man, whereas culture is his life's religion. If technology is life's conveyance, it is culture, which determines man's destination. The changes taking place in things like conveyances do no real harm. But, when the very bases of culture begin to be shuffled, human life will lose its meaningfulness.

The right way to make technology life's servant, while adopting religion as the basis of culture. Now when we find that of all religions, Islam is the only one, which has been properly preserved and established it goes without saying that the only basis for the construction of life on a foundation of culture is that of Islam. Islam provides a stable base for the construction of human life in which there is no question of change.

Muslims and the Mosque

Muslims today are faced with one easy and one difficult option: to leave the Babari Masjid issue to the conscience of the country, or to continue with their agitation. The situation being as it is, it would be exactly in accordance with the Prophet's Sunnah if they were to take the former course.

In order to arrive at a correct interpretation and application of the *Shariah's* commandments on the subject of the Babari Masjid, we must not lose sight of the change in priorities after December 6, 1992. Prior to that date, the question was, 'How to save the Babari Masjid?' Whereas now, the question is, 'How to prevent any further Ayodhya-like incidents?' Or, more pressingly, 'How to save the Muslims?'

In this case, it is vital to grasp the difference in relative importance between the mosque and the Muslims. According to the *Shariah*, they are entirely separate entities. The *Shariah's* respective commandments on the mosque, and the attitude required of Muslims towards it, are two quite separate questions. The former concerns the status of the mosque, while the latter concerns the responsibility of Muslims towards the mosque. These are clearly distinct and separate issues.

It is true that the *Shariah's* commandments on mosques are clear and laid down for all time. But their application to Muslims' obligations in respect of mosques, like many other commandments, will be subject to the prevailing circumstances; That is to say, it will be applicable in terms of the prevailing condition of the Muslims, and not according to the wordings of the command.

To understand this difference, let us take an example from Islam's earliest period, just after the Prophet had received his prophethood. At that time the Kabah housed no fewer than 360 idols. It might have been expected that revelations would be made urging the Prophet to remove these idols in order to purify the Kabah. But this did not happen. All that was enjoined in revelations was 'to cleanse your garment,' that is, improve your character. And verses of this nature continued to be revealed throughout the entire Meccan period. These verses were thus concerned with the question of Muslim responsibilities in such situations as prevailed in Mecca.

Keeping this distinction in view, let us now consider the question of the Babari Masjid. So far as the location of the mosque is concerned, it is accepted that, according to the *Shariah*, wherever a mosque has been lawfully built, that will be the mosque's permanent site. Muslims have no right to re-locate it.

The second question that arises is that if something happens to alter that state of affairs – as at Ayodhya – what will be the responsibility of the Muslims? Two options are open to them. They may either follow in the footsteps of Abdul Muttalib, the Prophet's grandfather, who, finding himself in just such a situation, took no action, because he held that a mosque being a holy place, God would Himself defend it as He pleased; or, they may rise in its defence. If Muslims follow the latter path, there would be a limit to

their action. After going beyond a certain limit they would have to withdraw. This limit has been indicated in the following verse of the Qur'an: 'Allah does not charge a soul with more than it can bear' (2:286). That is, a believer, or believer group should be held responsible only for what it is possible to do.

Granted that the *Shariah* holds the original site of a mosque to be its place for all time, the Muslims' responsibility to maintain that status is nevertheless an entirely different matter. When the question arises as to the duty of Muslims to safeguard any given mosque, the answer must depend not on the position of the mosque in Islam, or as defined by the *Shariah*, but on the position of Muslims in the prevailing circumstances.

Keeping this *Shariah* principle in view, let us now consider the question of the Babari Masjid and the Muslims. Only then will it become clear that Muslims are no longer responsible in this matter in the light of the *Shariah*. At an early stage they held themselves responsible for the safeguarding of the Babari Masjid, and carried out what they understood to be their duty at the cost of great sacrifice but, tragically, were unsuccessful. Now they should accept the fact that the events of December 6 have set the final limits to their area of responsibility. Having done whatever it was possible to do, they are now totally justified, from the standpoint of the *Shariah*, in remaining aloof from this matter, and bowing to future circumstances.

It has to be realized that after the tragic incident of December 6 the very nature of the problem has undergone quite basic changes. Now it is not so much a question of safeguarding the mosque, but of protecting Indian Muslims themselves.

If Muslims insist on continuing their agitational campaign, as of pre- December 6, far from being able to reconstruct the Babari Masjid on the same site, they will find themselves in the grip of riots all over the country. Besides, they will find themselves confronted by so many adverse factors that leading an honourable life in this country will become an impossibility.

The truth is that after December 6, it has been made abundantly clear that the choice for Muslims is not between building or not building the Babari Masjid, but between building the Babari Masjid and self-destruction. Continuance of such a campaign will achieve nothing for Muslims – certainly not the rebuilding of the Babari Masjid – but indescribable adversity if not ultimate ruination.

Another *Shariah* commandment relevant to this matter is known as *iztirar* or the law of necessity. This law permits a man to do something, which would normally be regarded as irregular or even unlawful. A man in this position would be called *muztar*. The eating of pork, for instance, is absolutely unlawful in Islam. Still the *Shariah* permits a man to eat pork, if otherwise he would starve to death. This clearly shows that deliberate self-destruction is not only *not* applauded by Islam, but is deemed unlawful.

The Muslim community in India is of the order of 125 million. Is it conceivable that when the very existence of so considerable a community is at stake, the *Shariah*, which clearly makes concessions to save individual lives, will be found rigid and unrelenting?.

Supposing that it was the Muslims' national responsibility to save the Babari Masjid, even then, given the circumstance, no further responsibility for it devolves upon them. When self-destruction is deemed unlawful, the *Shariah's* own dictates make it incumbent upon Muslims to remain aloof from the Babari Masjid issue in order to save themselves from further humiliation and loss. They should remember the tradition recorded in the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, according to which the Prophet's wife, Aishah, maintained that 'whenever the Prophet had to make a choice between two courses of action, he would always choose the easier one.'

Muslims today are faced with one easy and one difficult option: to leave the Babari Masjid issue to the conscience of the country, or to continue with their agitation. The situation being as it is, it would be exactly in accordance with the Prophet's Sunnah if they were to take the former course.

In adopting this path, they would not be doing anything new. They would be doing exactly as they had done for the last fifty years in this country. As we all know, in 1947, hundreds and thousands of mosques were variously desecrated and demolished in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. If Muslims never launched any agitation at that time in the name of these mosques, it was only because they felt that in this matter they were in the position of the *muztar*. If they were simply to add the Babari Masjid to the list of these mosques and refrain from any comment or action, they would only be doing what they had previously done in similar sets of circumstances.

There is nothing essentially new in my three-point formula (i.e. that Muslims should give up their plea for the Babari Masjid to be rebuilt, that they should be given guarantees that no such demolitions will take place in future, and that the Places of Worship Act should be made part of the constitution of India}. It simply spells out an honourable way of applying the same principle to the Ayodhya mosque as has been done in the case of thousands of other mosques in the country by the general consensus of the *ulama*. Acceptance of this formula would ensure that Muslims suffered no further loss of life or property, that Hindus would be bound not to repeat similar acts of demolition, and that Muslims would have constitutional protection for their places of worship.

As I have stated earlier, this formula is designed not to define the *Shariah's* position of the mosque but rather to support the *Shariah's* commandment regarding Muslims' own responsibility towards such a mosque. If this formula could be adopted and implemented, not only the Muslims but the entire country would benefit from it. Hatred and violence would come to an end, and peace would finally be restored. Muslims, as well as all other groups, would pave the opportunity to construct their lives peacefully, and would be able to tread the path of progress and success without any obstacle to bar their way.

In conclusion, I pray to God to grant His mercy to all of us, and to grant true wisdom and understanding to the people of this country so that they may march unitedly towards a peaceful, happy, prosperous future.

Gauging one's own strength before testing it on others

Abdullah ibn Umar relates how once, when he was listening to a sermon preached by Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, he took objection to something Hajjaj had said, and was just about to air his own views on this, when he recalled what the Prophet had once said-that it did not befit a believer to disgrace himself. Abdullah ibn Umar had asked the Prophet what was meant by disgracing oneself, and the Prophet had replied "It means attempting to deal with a problem which is quite beyond one's capacities."

This analysis of Muslim situation in terms of outmoded thinking is perfectly correct. What worse example of it could there be than the movement recently launched in the name of the Babari Masjid? The post –1986 campaigning for its protection and subsequently for its re-construction was instigated by Muslim leaders who were so incompetent and so deluded as to imagine that they could set themselves on a collision course with the Hindu public, and that the government-still the 'supreme arbiter' to the Muslims – would give a verdict totally in their favour.

What actually happened on December 6, 1992, publicly made it quite clear what a misconception this had been – and still is. It totally belied what the Prime Minister had publicly declared on August 15, 1992, i.e. that he would never allow the demolition of Babari Masjid. Despite his having dispatched ten police force companies to the border of Ayodhya and having made a number of other official arrangements, what happened in reality was not what the Prime Minister had in all good faith declared, but simply what the public-all along had been clamouring for, namely, the razing to the ground of the Babari Masjid. This was done by kar sevaks who forced their way into the town. Having demolished the mosque, they removed all stones and debris and replaced them with a make shift mandir. They also contrived to obtain the court's permission to place idols of Ram Lalla inside it, along with the right to visit it for darshan and puja.

This event is a clear proof of the public being superior in strength to the government in present-day India. It is a final demonstration of the public standing high above individuals who are voted to power for a limited period of time, even when the said individuals are accorded ministerial rank. One would have to be either very naive or bereft of all common sense to go on believing that this same central government which failed to prevent the demolition of the Babari Masjid, has the power to demolish the newly constructed mandir, either peaceably or by force, or to remove the idols placed therein for the purpose of re-building the Babari Masjid on its former site.

Yet, as reported in the press, a delegation of about twenty 'prominent persons' of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board came to Delhi in April 1993, where they prepared a memorandum by consensus, asking the government to remove the makeshift mandir and the idols from the site of the Babari Masjid,

and to rebuild the Babari Masjid in exactly the same location. This they submitted to the Prime Minister at a meeting they had with him on April 5th. Obviously, the demolition of the Babari Masjid in broad daylight had done nothing to jolt our so-called Muslim leaders into a proper state of awareness.

To make such a political foray as representatives of the Muslim community is nothing sort of anachronism. The most poignant lesson the Muslims should have learnt from the December 6 happening was that from that point in time onwards they had best concentrate their energies on winning over the Hindu public. All their efforts should have been channelled into influencing the Hindu Janta rather than into making representations to the 'rulers' of New Delhi. The fact that our leaders are still circumambulating New Delhi is a clear indication of their utter incompetence. Given the present state of impasse it is incomprehensible that a delegation from the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board should even have approached the Prime Minister with such a request. The only possible reason is their total inability to come to grips with present-day realities. Mentally they are still living in the India of fifty years ago. They still do not grasp the fact that, today, India is governed, not by a sovereign, with all powers vested in his own person, but by the people.

It is high time that Muslims changed their way of thinking. They must look to the Hindu public and not to the government or the administration. Muslim leaders must meet Hindu leaders. Muslims must improve their relations with the Hindu majority. In fact, Hindus and Muslims must interact at all levels if ever tensions are to be eased between them and misunderstandings removed. Only in that way will improved relations and peaceful co-existence become distinct realities.

The solution to our problems lies not in Muslim-ruler meetings, but in Hindu-Muslim meetings. The need of the hour is for a Hindu-Muslim dialogue at an all-India level with the participation of serious and influential people from both communities. Its aim should be the promotion of peace in a purely non-political way.

In this dialogue people from both the communities should not only state quite openly what they want from the other community, but must strive also to put to an end to this confrontational state of affairs and to discover common grounds on the basis of which both the communities could live together like good neighbours.

The holding of such a dialogue is in complete consonance with the Islamic *Shariah*. The Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyya in the history of Islam was the result of a successful dialogue of this kind. After the Prophet of Islam's migration (622 A D), there was a sharp deterioration in relations between Muslims and non-Muslim in Arabia resulting in a number of armed confrontations.

Finally, in 628, the Prophet of Islam came to stay for two weeks at a place called Hudaibiyya, near Mecca. He negotiated with the Meccan non-Muslims there, and then, after conceding to many of their demands, he signed a peace

At present, the rock on which India's progress is foundering is the strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. If a dialogue of the above nature could be held in all seriousness, in a spirit of accommodation and with a strict sense of justice, Hindu-Muslim relations could very soon be normalized, and this in itself would immediately open up a whole new chapter in the history of modern India. Nothing would then stand in the way of our country's future advancement.

Two Methods

There are two ways of launching a movement, one by *demands* and the other by *revolution*. The former, exemplified for all time by the life of the Prophet Muhammad, has regrettably had to yield pride of place to the latter which is the more favoured, not only by communists, but also by present-day Muslims. Today, it is not only those of communists persuasions who rely on the revolutionary method, but also Muslims, who are everywhere to be found in armed encounters with their supposed rivals. Although many make their point by organising media protest campaigns, those who have access to bombs and bullets are quick to use them.

Why is it that Muslims are so enamoured of the revolutionary method, to the point of forgetting that there is such a thing as the *dawah* method? Why should they favour the ideology of Marx and Lenin when they have the *Sunnah* of the Final Prophet to show them the way?

The revolutionary path is that of reaction, and just explaining it in Islamic terms does not transform it into an Islamic method. *Dawah*, on the other hand, calls for patience and avoidance of confrontation. This method, as opposed to that of reaction, is doubtless the more difficult of the two, but, in the long run, is the best calculated to bear fruit.

The revolutionary method is negative in that it has its roots as hatred and is guided by mere human desires; it calls for instant action, and it is always the others, who are pelted with stones. On the contrary, the *dawah* method is positive in that it grows out of love. Where revolution calls for precipitateness, *dawah* advises patience, caution. Where revolutionary acts earn one popularity, *dawah* leads one into self-obliteration and the readiness to be the target of others' stones.

Revolution is material in that it centres on human wants. *Dawah* is spiritual in that it is inspired by the Qur'an and the Hadith. Revolution aims at an external target. *Dawah* aims at eternal truth – a wholly internal matter.

Outward, Inward

Man exists on two levels, the outward and the inward. Likewise, his activities fall into two categories, one originating from deep, inner states and convictions, and the other from external compulsions. Broadly speaking, man's activities are, therefore, governed by external compulsions or internal convictions.

If the activities of the present day Muslims are examined in the light of this division they will mostly fall into that of external compulsions. Their activities may appear to be different in nature from one another, and their utterances too may appear to be different, but when you examine them from the angle of reality and not appearance, all would appear to belong to the same category. In one respect or the other, they all spring from external compulsions.

A movement having its roots in external compulsion, no matter how lofty the claim, can never be Islamic in nature. Such a movement would be materialistic, and would have nothing to do with religion based on God-worship. An Islamic movement is one, which is based purely on inner states and convictions, the result of a great transformation of man's personality.

Such a movement is brought about by those who have experienced the realization of God, and whose speech is silence, living as they do in the company of unseen angels. Their tears testify to the storm raging inside, for they have discovered the secret of communicating with God, through silence. For them the seen realities of this world lose all significance and the unseen realities of the next world appear as clear as the mountain tops.

Facing the Court

Mr. Manohar J. Pherwani, a government officer, rose in service to become Chairman of the Unit Trust of India and of the National Housing Bank, both highly rated posts in economic spheres. In 1991, the Reserve Bank of India issued a circular, which stated that bank funds should not be transferred to the stock market. Disregarding this circular, Mr. Pherwani issued a cheque for Rs. 3,078.63 crores to a broker. He was later brought to book for flouting government regulations. He resigned from his post on May 9, 1992. This chain of events was reported in the *Hindustan Times* of May 22 and June 3, 1992.

His case was handed over to the C.B.I. for investigation, a development that ultimately proved disastrous. He so feared being unable to exonerate himself of all blame in court, that only twelve days after resigning, he complained of severe chest pains around 2.25 am, and within five minutes he had collapsed. He was only 58 years of age.

The trauma of having to appear in a man-made court proved too overwhelming for Mr. Pherwani. But if he felt afraid of having to account for his actions in a court set up by human beings, how would he feel about appearing in a court set up by the Almighty? When having to face a human court proves so unnerving, what will a man's condition be when he finds himself standing trial in the divine court?

Death may spare a man from facing human judges, but it will immediately set him before his Maker, the greatest Divine Judge, which will be a much more terrifying experience. This is a matter of the utmost gravity. Were man to ponder upon it, he would be shaken to the very core.

Paradise and its Inhabitants

What is Paradise? Paradise is the supreme reward, which God gives to His special servants for their deserving actions. Paradise is a world of unique blessings, admission to which is reserved for the chosen few in the second stage of life, the Hereafter.

God's special servants are those who have demonstrated in ample measure their ability to live on the plane of realities in this present stage of life – the stage of trial. They are the ones who have discovered God's existence from His signs; who have found that the messenger of God is a human being just like themselves; who, without having seen God, have prostrated themselves before Him in all humility.

These are unique human beings who, having been created with an ego, have nevertheless divested themselves of it in the interests of truth; who, having been given, complete freedom of word and deed, have voluntarily placed constraints upon themselves; who, having apparently achieved everything by dint of their own hard labour, have nonetheless given complete credit for all of their achievements to God.

These are unique souls who, living amongst human beings, are constantly remembering God. They are the ones who have had power over all others, but who now exercise the utmost restraint over their hands and tongues out of fear of God; it is they who have agitated to take revenge, but who have had the fire in their souls cooled by God's chastisement.

These are the worthy individuals who relish taking the back seats while others scramble for the front rows. These are the people who give their lives to lay solid foundations while others rush to find places right on tops of the domes.

These are the people of great spiritual refinement, who rise above personal prejudices before sitting in judgement; who, in order to deal with others purely on the basis of principles, eliminate their own selves; who budge not one inch from the path of justice even at the most crucial of moments, when complaints and differences seem insurmountable. They do so by adopting a path for themselves, which accords exactly with the path of truth and justice, and by overlooking all worldly considerations.

Paradise is God's garden. Only those human beings deserve it who can live in this world with the blameless innocence of flowers.

Hastening to pray in times of difficulty

It was the time of the Battle of the Trench, and, according to Hudhayfah, there were three hundred Muslims under siege. Recalling what a hard night it was, he recounts how they were surrounded by Abu Sufyan's army on one side and the Banu Qurayzah on the other, both posing a threat to the safety of the Muslim families. "The cold was already quite intense and, when a storm blew up, there was thunder and lightning everywhere and stones hurtling and crashing in the wind. It was almost impossible to see anything. Just then the Prophet came and asked me to cross the trench and penetrate the enemy camp to collect information. It was essential to know if they were planning to prolong the siege or return to Mecca. I was the most timid of men and was extremely sensitive to the cold. Still, on receiving the Prophet's command, I immediately arose he prayed for my safety, and I set off. I went hither and thither in Abu Sufyan's camp and was able to bring back the news that they were discussing plans to leave. On my return, I found the Prophet covered in his sheet, praying. Whenever the Prophet was confronted with some arduous task, he would begin to pray."

Two Categories

Paradise is the ultimate abode of the pious servants of God. As the Qur'an tells us, the inhabitants of Paradise will fall into two broad categories: the specially exalted class of good people, who are nearest to God (*muqarrabun*, 56:11-26) and righteous people in general, who are called Companions of the Right Hand. Magnificent rewards are reserved for the first group ... the Foremost in faith, while rewards of a general nature are reserved for the other group.

What will be the basis of the difference between the two categories? The Qur'an tells us that those who gave of their wealth before the Prophet's victory and who took part in the fighting are of a higher standing than others who did not. Their degree is greater (57:10). The difference does not relate just to the period in which they lived, but to the nature of their faith. This is what will determine the final categorization.

The truth stands by itself, in abstract form, at the very outset. It is like an ideology which is supported solely by the force of logic. Later when truth enters into the phase of victory and influence, it no longer assumes the shape of a mere intellectual exercise, but rather becomes a tangible reality, visible to one and all.

In the initial stages, truth is recognizable only through verbal argument, whereas, in the later stages, concrete evidence is there to support it. In the first phase, as soon as, a man accepts the truth, he becomes a stranger among his own people. One who accepts it in a later phase immediately becomes respected and popular. In the first phase a man stands to lose, whereas in the second, he is the gainer. In the first phase one is likely to sink into oblivion, whereas in the second, one scales the heights. It is the difference made by the kind of sacrifices one has made which decides whether one is to be placed in the first or in the second category.

The Language of Hadith

Dr. Maurice Bucaille has brought out many books and articles on the subject of the veracity of the Qur'an. He has proved by scientific argument that the Qur'an is the Book of God.

He does not, however, place the Hadith on the same plane as the Qur'an. Expressing his doubts regarding the authenticity of the Hadith, he holds that some traditions are authentic, but that others are either dubious, or should be rejected outright. (p. 243)

This comment is based on a misunderstanding. There is a hadith, for instance, which explains that the intense heat of summer is due to blasts of wind from hell. He failed to understand the meaningfulness of this hadith, because he took it quite literally. Actually, this *hadith* is only one of the many that are couched in symbolic language.

Let us take just one instance for illustration. It was the custom among Arabs for people of rank to follow funeral processions on horseback or camelback. When the Prophet once saw some people riding on horses alongside a cortege he asked: "Are not you ashamed that the angels are walking on foot while you are riding on horses?" (Ibn Majah, *Sunan*)

This does not mean that the angels have feet like ours, and were literally walking on foot. The Prophet in fact wanted to stress the point in a symbolic way, that when a man has completed his term of trial, and is on his way to the Hereafter, it is a time for humility and modesty. In keeping with this spirit, it is only proper to walk on foot with the funeral. That is to say, it is a time for the humble servants of the Lord to walk on foot rather than indulge in the luxury of conveyances.

The similes in the Hadith are all meant for illustration. They should be understood as figures of speech and not taken literally.

The Greatness of Humility

I once happened to meet a gentleman who had neither a proper education nor a sound economic position. His greatest asset, as he saw it, was the fact that his grandfather, who lived in a palatial house, had been one of the Nawab's close associates and had an honourable title bestowed upon him. He went on at some length, and with great pride, about his grandfather's exalted state.

I had the impression that the cause of his own destitution was his pride in his ancestry. The psychology which went with being one of a noble line had prevented him from either acquiring a good education or engaging himself in some profitable business. Out of sympathy for his down-at-heel condition, I tried to make him understand the importance of adopting a humble and realistic attitude, as opposed to that of continuing pride in his forefather's achievements. To support my arguments, I narrated many telling incidents, but it was all to no avail. He was beyond understanding. It was as if I were conversing with him in a totally alien language.

The same is true of present-day Muslims who draw their emotional sustenance from the religion of pride. If this is happening on an ever-expanding scale, it is because they fail to understand the religion of humility.

Islam, for the believers of the early stages, was just such a religion – a religion of humility. This psychology of humility, which marked their thoughts and deeds, was produced by their keen awareness of the greatness of God. For them God's law became a reality, for God elevates all those who adopt the posture of humility. From there, by the grace of God, they went on to emblazon their deeds and their virtues on the pages of human history for all time to come.

The Muslims of the present day are the successors of the Muslims of those early stages. It is unfortunate, however, that they have inherited from them not their humility, but only the recollection of the great heights to which their remote ancestors rose. Devoid of humility and its resultant virtues, they are carried through life on a flood of grandiloquence.

The need of the hour is to awaken in them the true spirit of their faith so that they may be brought closer to religion based on humility. God elevates the humble: the proud and the vain are cast by Him into oblivion.

A Message

Q. Today we are a deeply divided society. To what principle of life should we then turn – Hindus, Muslims and others – so that we may live in harmony?

A. The answer is the same as you would give a child who tells you that he wants a rose, but that the rosebush is covered with thorns. You tell him quite simply that he should by all means pluck the flower, but be careful to avoid the thorns.

In our dealings with others we must remember that people are like rosebushes. They have their roses, but they also have their thorns. The rose is man's conscience. The thorn is his ego. So in any human interaction, you should refrain from hitting out at the ego, and attempt instead to touch the conscience. In that way harmony will prevail in society at all times.

Every individual is born with an ego and a conscience. While the ego is a source of hatred, the conscience is a source of love. When both lie dormant, it is up to you which you choose to awaken. If you awaken the ego, you will get hatred and enmity in return. But if you awaken the conscience, you will get love and friendship.

I should like to recount an incident which very aptly illustrates this point. In a certain town in Madhya Pradesh, the Hindus led a procession through the streets of a Muslim area. When it drew level with a mosque, heated arguments broke out between the processionists and the Imam of the mosque. Then some Muslims threw stones at the procession, the Hindus retaliated, and the result was a communal riot.

The Imam Sahab later realized that the cause of the riot had been the arousal of the processionist's egos when they had stones thrown at them. He decided, therefore, that if the Hindus again marched in procession past the mosque he would act differently. He would instead awaken their consciences.

The following year, the Hindus did again march in procession through the Muslim area. When they reached the mosque, the Imam, as he had privately resolved, came out to meet them, but this time with a garland of flowers. He welcomed the leader and placed the garland around his neck. This gesture awakened the Hindus' conscience. Where, in previous years, Hindus and Muslims had clashed with each other, this year they began embracing one another.

Not even martyrdom cancels out an unpaid debt

The Prophet, admonishing his followers, told them that the struggle for God's cause, and faith in Him were the greatest of all actions. A man arose and asked, "If I am slain while I am about God's business, will all my sins be forgiven?" The Prophet replied, "If, in the patient pursuance of your purpose, pressing ever onwards, but at the same time seeking God's pleasure, you are slain in His path, your sins will indeed be forgiven." After a pause the man, at the Prophet's request, repeated his question. "Does this mean that if I am slain while I am about God's business, all my sins will be forgiven?" The Prophet gave the same answer to this but added: "But not if you are in debt. That is what I have been told by Gabriel."

Gratitude

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet once said, "One who never expresses his gratitude to other human beings will never be thankful to God."

Thankfulness is a state of mind which cannot be compartmentalised. If it manifests itself in one place, the chances are that it will do so in other places too. If a man shows gratitude to one person, he will surely show it to others likewise.

When a man does someone a good turn, it is something quite obvious – a tangible direct experience. On the contrary, God's kindness, being an indirect experience, is not at all obvious. One has to be perceptive, and reflective to be able to realise what favours are granted to man by God. While the favours a man does are observable, God's favours can be realized only by thinking about them.

One who fails to perceive an event which is directly observable cannot be expected to grasp something which can be apprehended only after a great deal of cogitation.

If the recipient of a favour fails to acknowledge it for fear of belittling himself in the eyes of his benefactor, he does himself nothing but harm. It is more a question of being belittled in the eyes of his own conscience than falling down in others' eyes – a course by far the more injurious.

An even greater disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one's fellow men leads on to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the Universe. There is no greater loss in this world than one who has failed to acknowledge his Creator.

The News of the Last Day

A high-intensity earthquake lasting 45 seconds and epicentred at Almora, U.P, rocked northern India at a quarter to twelve, midnight, on October 20, 1991. With the same jolts, which could be felt even as far away as Delhi, hundreds of houses collapsed, about a thousand people were killed and more than three thousand were injured.

Although so devastating in its effects, in comparison with that supreme, world-shaking event, the *Qiyamah* (the Day of Resurrection) an earthquake is but a very minor affair. Nevertheless, it gives us an idea of what will happen on, that day on a much vaster scale. The *Times of India* of October 21, 1991, reported an incident which took place on that very night which provides a telling parallel. It seems that at 2.30 a.m. just ten minutes before the earthquake began, certain Punjab militants opened fire on the Sirsa (District Bareilly) police station with AK-47 rifles, where the few police personnel on duty at that time were ill-equipped for effective defence. However, the militants had not reckoned with the forces of nature. Instead of just dealing with a small police chowky, they now found themselves battling with a vastly superior enemy. Like all the other people in the vicinity they fled in terror, no doubt thinking that the heavens were falling on them.

The helplessness experienced in the face of an earthquake is nothing compared to the state of desperation man will be reduced to on the *Qiyamah*. Then he will be confronted with the biggest imaginable earthquake, and will be powerless to control it.

When possessed with power, man tends to become haughty and over-confident. But when the earth is so shaken that the mountains come tumbling down and it is engulfed by the mighty waves of the ocean, he will flee, in utter bewilderment, leaving all his possessions behind him. To his horror, he will find that there is no escape route whatsoever.

Lesson-Giving

In its cover story of February 10, 1992, 'America in the mind of Japan, Japan in the mind of America' *Time Magazine* writes: "America, still the most powerful economy, nonetheless feels itself to be somehow the diminished thing. The old enemy, the Soviet Union, has vanished. With the U.S. running a \$41 billion trade deficit with Japan, the once deferential partner begins to look to some Americans" like the new enemy. This report can be summed up in these words of the article: "Friction between the U.S. and Japan makes a deeper truth: the two nations need each other." (p 8)

With the end of the second world war America emerged as the dominant power and Japan's lot was that of the vanquished nations. But today the situation has been reversed. The reason is entirely moral. Where America had conquered Japan by the superior power of its weapons, it was finally character which reigned supreme. Japan, endowed with a superior national character, came to dominate the victor.

According to this magazine article not only the Japanese but also many Americans blame America itself for its economic problems. Masao Kunihiro, a Japanese anthropologist writes: "Whatever happened to the good old Emersonian Credo that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door? That is what made America what it is today, economically and industrially powerful. But many of us, rightly or wrongly, now feel that the U.S. is no longer turning out mousetraps which are better than ours." (p. 14)

Another Japanese commentator, Yoshio Sakurachi, analysing America's shortcomings, tells us the Japanese impression: "The root of America's trade problem lies in the inferior quality of American labor." (p. 14)

Had Japan expended all its energy in launching propaganda campaign in the form of talks, speeches, articles and books (just as Muslims are engaged all over the world) to expose America for the barbarous treatment it meted out to Japan in the second world war, then Japan would have gained nothing. Rather, whatever resources were left to it after the world war would have been lost in the protest campaigns.

Instead of indulging in negative activities, Japan adopted the policy of 'patience' for the inhuman treatment it received, in the meanwhile engaging itself in the mission of self reconstruction. The result was splendid. After a period of only forty years the whole course of world history was seen to have changed. Those who were left behind had come forward, while those who had occupied the front rows had to retreat to the back seats.

The basis of the partition of the country in 1947, at least implicitly, was that India was to be declared a Hindu state, and Pakistan a Muslim state. And it did happen in Pakistan. It was declared a Muslim state. So the logical parallel was to declare India a Hindu state. But one thing in India, prevented such a

declaration being made. That was that Hindus had gone sufficiently ahead in modern education for a majority of their educated class to think along non-religious lines, Pandit Nehru being at the apex. It was due to the pressure of these educated Hindus that India was declared a secular state instead of a Hindu state.

This state of affairs was indeed a boon for the Indian Muslims. Unfortunately though, due to the misguided leadership of certain Muslim leaders, they could never place secularism in its correct perspective. Their leaders had told them that secularism meant an anti-religious system. That is why they were never in a position to think about it with clear minds. They could never adjust to this idea.

The interpretation of secularism, quite simply, means 'a worldly or non-religious system.' As such, in a pluralistic society secularism entails a political settlement, whereby religious freedom is granted in private spheres, while the ordinary, everyday worldly spheres of life are dealt with on a non-religious basis. This obviates the kind of dissension which can arise in a society where people of different persuasions exist side by side.

According to this interpretation, secularism cannot be called an anti-religious system. To put it more precisely in the Indian context, secularism can be termed a system of non-interference. That is, the state maintains a policy of noninterference in the religious affairs of various groups, while attending to practical matters of concern to all the groups, on a non-religious basis.

As a result of this misunderstanding by the Muslims, they failed to participate fully in secularism. Those Muslims who openly participated in the secular system were never respected, and never gained credibility among the Muslims. This is the basic reason for secularism not being a complete success in the country.

Although Muslims are numerically in a minority, due to their large numbers they are in the position of being next to the majority in the country. A community in this position has an extremely crucial role to play. It is because of this special position of Muslims that no system in India can be successfully established unless Muslims accept it and extend to it their full cooperation.

All the known records prove that Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and his colleagues were secular in the best sense of the word. Had they received the full support of the Muslim community, they certainly would have succeeded in establishing a secular system in the country.

Whatever the system, secular or Islamic, it can, never be perfect in this world of ours. It will always have some shortcoming or the other. India being such a vast country, something or the other will always fall short of the ideal, even if it were an Islamic state. Failing to understand this situation Muslims have repeatedly pinpointed the supposed or real shortcomings of the system and regularly make fiery speeches and write barbed articles which denigrate the system. They accuse the Congress of functioning under the banner of secularism without actually practicing it. As a result, Muslims have continued to give

a negative vote, thereby seriously undermining the stability of the Congress, the stability which was necessary to establish a secular system.

For instance, take the question of government service. Seeing that the Muslim ratio was much lower in government jobs, Muslims alleged that the government talked a great deal about secularism but that, in fact, most of the jobs were given to Hindus, not Muslims. This was not the case. The actual reason for the greater number of Hindus in govt jobs was to be found elsewhere. When Muslims in govt jobs migrated to Pakistan in large numbers before partition the Hindus who had left their jobs to come to India were naturally given first preference. Automatically, they came to exceed the number of Muslims in govt, jobs.

Another reason for the smaller ratio was that Muslims were 100 years behind Hindus in modern education. There were, therefore, far fewer degree holders among Muslims than among Hindus.

For instance, at the Aligarh Muslim University, when the Muslims opened their own medical college, using their own funds, they were forced to employ Hindu professors. The reason being that the Muslims themselves had lagged too far behind in medical education in particular to apply for such positions.

This is traceable to Muslims' lack of awareness of modern imperatives. Their negative response to the opening of the first medical college in Calcutta in 1835 is a matter of history. While Muslims were taking out processions for its closure, Hindus were at the same time seeking admission to it. Muslims in fact could not separate the English from their sciences. Since they were launching movements against British rule, they thought that even their sciences had also to be discarded. It was for reasons such as these that Muslims have suffered in the past and are still suffering the consequences. However, they were quick to lay all the blame at the door of the government, even in places where the government had no hand.

No system can work efficiently without the cooperation of the public. The government can undertake only 50 per cent of the task. The other 50 percent has to be undertaken by the people.

But instead of pulling their weight, which would have meant correcting their own attitude, they ranged themselves against secularism, of which they felt profoundly suspicious. Their failure to improve their own conditions in terms of education only made them more rigid in this stance.

Now this state of affairs was exploited by the fundamentalist Hindus. They may not have been the creators of this state of affairs, but I would stress that they have exploited the situation.

Since secularism was upheld by the Congress, and favoured by educated classes everywhere, fundamentalist groups found themselves relegated to the background. The theocratic state was in the process everywhere of being rejected by the enlightened minds. But Muslims did not play their role. This is what is largely responsible for the erosion of secularism. There are certainly other factors, but Muslims' failure to realize the actual meaning of secularism is the most decisive one.

Muslims failed to play their 50 per cent part, thus encouraging the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. If the BJP seats in Parliament rose from 2 to 119 the direct responsibility for this must be attributed to the ill-advised leadership of Muslims.

Pandit Nehru had an excellent team of individuals, imbued with the spirit of secularism, in the best sense of the word, but Muslims failed to support them. There were certain Muslims both inside and outside the party who favoured secularism but since our leaders had implanted the wrong idea in people's minds that secularism was anti-Islam, these individuals were never respected in the community, hence they failed to gain the credibility among Muslims which was necessary for them to play an effective role.

Now Muslims will have to change their thinking. They must realize that secularism is not anti-Islam or anti-religion, but that it is the best possible principle on which to run a pluralistic society.

True knowledge is that which induces fear of God

Once, when some of the Prophet's companions were sitting with him, he looked up to the heavens and said: "The time is coming when knowledge will be taken away." One of the Ansar, who went by the name of Ziyad ibn Labeed, asked the Prophet how knowledge would be taken away from them, when they were in possession of the Book of God, and taught it to their wives and children. "I always thought of you as the most intelligent man in Medina," the Prophet told him, "don't you see how the Jews went astray, even although they were in possession of the Book of God?" The narrator of this tradition, one Jubayr ibn Nufayr, went to Shaddad ibn Aus and went into the details of the tradition with him. "Do you know how knowledge will be taken away?" Shaddad asked him. Jubair replied that he did not. "By its vessel taken away," said Shaddad, and he went on to ask; "Do you know which knowledge will be taken away?" When Jubayr once again replied in the negative, Shaddad explained that it was the fear of God that would be taken away. "There will not be a God-fearing man to be seen."

The Master Key

An article in an Arabic magazine headlined *Al-Miftahul Azim* (Master Key), citing *dawah* power as the greatest of all Islamic strengths, says that if in the past, Islam achieved its universal victories through *dawah*, today, it can turn its defeats into victories by the same method.

Dawah is very much under discussion these days among Muslim writers and speakers. Its exponents, however, spend more time unraveling the plots and conspiracies hatched against them by non-Muslim nations than in practising what they preach. That is to say that, on the one hand, they exhort Muslims to assume the role of *da'is* while, on the other hand, they assure them with great vehemence that as far as the Muslims are concerned, all the nations of the world have turned into rapacious wolves and, as such, must be fought against and annihilated.

Both these utterances are made in the same breath, without any awareness of their contradictory nature, the one spelling peace and the other spelling war. And who are these nations who, day in and day out, are labelled oppressors and conspirators? They are those very non-Muslim nations who are the potential recipients of *dawah*. They are our *mad'us*. The Muslims are the *da'is* and their neighbouring nations are the *mad'us*. Now, when *da'is* are constantly having it dinned into them that the *mad'u* is a cruel predator, there can be no arousal of any sincere missionary spirit as described in the Qur'an: the *dayee* is truly a well-wisher of his *mad'u*.

Dawah is wholly an experience of love. The *da'is* must be fully committed to guiding his *mad'u*. Only then can the process of *dawah* be meaningful. The *dayee* must ignore the antagonism and combativeness of the *madu*; he must erase all adverse impressions of the *madu* from his heart, so that he may spontaneously begin praying for the *madu's* guidance.

People talk of *dawah* without ever realizing its pre-requisites. They want the credit for being *da'is* without ever fulfilling its demands. They want the credit for communicating the divine message to man without paying the price for it.

This is true not only of the weak Muslim minority in non-Muslim countries, but also of the Muslim majority living in Muslim countries. The only difference between these two categories is that the former have endless grievances against the local non-Muslim authorities, while the latter blame their woes on international non-Muslim powers such as the Jews, Christians, Orientalists, and so on.

In Islam, the most important consideration of all is *dawah*. All other considerations no matter how serious and important they may be, can be legitimately passed over in its favour. The Sunnah of the Prophet gives such clear guidelines on this subject as leaves no doubt in the mind of a lover of Truth.

Shortly before his migration to Medina, the Prophet visited Taif. There, scorned by the inhabitants, he was subjected to the worst kind of humiliations details of which can be had from *Sirah* books. The Prophet later told his wife, Aisha, that he had never had a harder day than the one in Taif. It was when the Prophet left Taif in great grief and sorrow that he was visited by the angel of the mountains at God's command. He said to the Prophet, "God Has heard what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mount. If you ask me I can crush their settlement by these mountains." The Prophet replied, "No, I am still hopeful that there will arise people among their following generations who will worship God without associating anything with Him." (Ibn Kathir, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*. Vol. II, p. 153).

It is quite plain that *dawah* is the master key. But it takes a great heart to make use of it. It takes a character of the utmost sublimity – *Khuluqin Azim*, as it is described in the Qur'an. Only those who possess such qualities can recognize and utilize such opportunities as come their way.

God has made *dawah* the master Key for believers for all time. Whatever the Muslims gained in the first phase of Islamic history was through *dawah*. Any future gains will likewise be through *dawah*, for the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in world history is still making its impact. It has facilitated the processes of *dawah* and invested them with great power. It is still the super key to meaningful achievement in the world of religion.

In modern times, the latest methods of communication have provided new avenues for the propagation of Islam. But even more important is the development of various branches of scientific research which have quite finally established the veracity of Islam. What was formerly achieved by our predecessors in circumstances fraught with great difficulty because of poor, or non-existent communications, and a lack of scientific proofs, can now be accomplished with comparative ease.

Dawah is certainly the master key for believers. But it will prove to be so only when true Islamic pre-requisites are kept in mind.

Trusting in God, not wealth

During the Caliphate of Umar, some revenue arrived from Iraq. Umar began to distribute it, and appeared to be on the point of exhausting it completely when Abd ar Rahman ibn Auf suggested to Umar that he should keep some of it back in order to deal with any enemy attack or calamity that might befall them. At this, Umar was indignant. "Be done with you; you play the devil's advocate. No, by God, for the sake of tomorrow, I will not disobey God today."

What a believer's speech should be like

The Prophet said: "A true believer does not insult or curse people: neither does he use foul or vulgar language."